



City Connection

Volume 5, Number 11

AUGUST 2009

www.huntsvilletx.gov

Citizens, City staff to complete 2009 Charter Review

The 2009 City Charter Review Committee has begun its work on refining and updating the City Charter.

The 11-member group, which is comprised of Huntsville citizens, City of Huntsville staff and one City Council member, will spend the month of August closely analyzing the document.

After several meetings, the group may recommend changes to the document to the City Council.

If changes are to be made to the document, the Council will have to finalize those changes and call for a November election by September 2.

"My hope for the Charter Review Committee is that we review the charter, look at things that may need to be addressed and have our suggestions to Council so they can declare an election by September 2," said Dennis Reed, chairman of the Charter Review Committee. "As a committee, we've agreed that the charter isn't broken, and all we're going to do is tweak it at best."

According to Mayor J. Turner, the purpose of the Charter Review process is to make changes to the 30-page charter with the best interests of the citizens of Huntsville in mind.

"The City Charter is like the City of Huntsville's constitution, and we very much respect our citi-

zens' sovereignty," Turner said. "This process is an opportunity to make refinements to the Charter to benefit our city and our citizens."

Citizen input, Reed said, will be a critical aspect of the Charter Review process and the final recommendations to be considered by Council.

"We will take citizen input during each of our meetings, so if any citizens have concerns with the charter, they will have ample

opportunity to share those concerns with the committee," Reed said. "Other changes may have to do with state laws that have changed, and City Attorney Leonard Schneider has also pointed out a few minor changes to be made."

"The main thing to understand is that this is an ongoing process, and we're just trying to keep the charter up-to-date in the best interest of all involved."

The 2009 Charter Review Committee includes Reed, Mayor Pro Tem Lanny Ray, Blaine Hinds, Jack Ross, Frank Fair, Sandra Hanscom, Bob Heartfield, Jack Kyle, and ex-officio members Schneider, City Manager Bill Baine and Deputy City Secretary Kristin Edwards.

The group was appointed by Turner during the July 21 City Council meeting and holds meetings at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M.



City of Huntsville homeowners may have an opportunity to have household water and sewer lines, meters and faucets repaired for free!

For more information, turn to page 3.

Citizens of Huntsville

*Be a part of Democracy in Action! Your input is requested and respected!
We invite you to visit our City facilities, attend Council meetings and take part in your community!*

\$ Understanding the Budget Process: Tax information \$

By Winston Duke—City of Huntsville Director of Finance

During the budget process, a role of the Finance Department is to estimate tax revenues that are dependent upon values established by the Walker County Appraisal District. Values are provided by the District during the summer budget process and are then used to calculate tax revenues for the upcoming fiscal year, 2009-2010.

The Walker County Appraisal District assesses property values annually and certifies the taxable value to the city and other governmental taxing entities in the latter part of July. Properties are assessed at market valuation by various property categories. Exemptions such as those for homestead and agricultural use are applied and subtracted from the value. Commercial property may have exemptions applied as those for abatements or other trade designations. The resulting value of market less exemptions provides the taxable value. Values frozen for those properties owned by people over-65 are considered in the Appraised values submitted by the district. The Appraisal Board also may consider values under protest in their determination of taxable value.

In understanding the effect on an individual's taxes, one should know that any particular property may have an increase or decrease in taxes depending on their particular situation. Have there been more or fewer exemptions? Have there been property improvements? Has the value of the individual property risen or fallen? A single property may rise when the overall valuation has gone down, and vice versa. Therefore the city may be publishing notice of an increase or decrease, and the opposite may be happening with a single property.

The Appraisal District collects taxes on behalf of the city pursuant to a contract and also reports on the effective and rollback rate, with the calculations approved by the Finance Department. These rates are published after certification at the beginning of August.

The effective rate is approximately the value providing the same revenue as in the current year with the new tax valuations. If overall property values go down, then the effective rate will rise to allow the

city to achieve the same level of tax revenues. If values rise, the effective rate will decline since there is a greater tax base to collect the same revenue dollars. The value of new property added to the role for the first time is excluded from the calculation. Essentially the effective rate is the measure to determine the rate that would give the city approximately the same revenues as in the prior year.

The city may adopt the effective rate or another rate while following rules prescribed for adopting the budget. If the same rate is adopted, the city will publish a tax increase with a rising overall valuation because more revenue will be collected, and a decrease with a falling valuation because less revenue will be collected.

If the city exceeds the effective rate or may present a budget with property tax collections that exceed the rate, then the city must have two tax hearings and publish notices as prescribed by the State Comptroller's Office. The Comptroller's Office publishes rules regarding all hearings, and notices that includes such details as wording, headings, font sizes, placement in the newspaper, and web notice requirements.

The rollback rate is also published with the effective rate. The rollback rate is the rate at which the entity levying taxes is subject to a rollback of taxes upon petitioning by the public by a certain number of voters. Upon the determination of a successful petition, the city will call an election for the public to decide whether the taxes will be reduced. The rollback rate is generally considered an increase of 8%; however, it is an increase of 8% over the effective rate. The effective rate may be higher or lower than the rate adopted for the current year, and so the rollback rate may be less or more than 8% over the current rate.

To consider the budget, the City Council holds budget workshops that are open to the public. A budget hearing is required before adoption. The adoption of the budget and setting of the tax rate are approved by ordinance as separate agenda items.

Police/Fire Statistics: June 2009

Police:

- ♦ Calls for service: **4546**
- ♦ Accidents investigated: **79**
- ♦ Animal Control complaints investigated: **95**

Fire:

- ♦ Calls for service: **138**
- ♦ Main alarm calls: **30**

Grant funds available with strong volunteer assistance

Town Hall Meeting to prove Huntsville's need for \$350,000 ORCA grant

Residents of the City of Huntsville have a unique opportunity this month to potentially take advantage of replacing their water and sewer lines with assistance provided through the Office of Rural and Community Affairs.

On August 13, the City will hold a Small Town Environmental Program (STEP) Town Hall Meeting beginning at 6 p.m. at Mance Park Middle School. Based on the attendance and success of the meeting, local volunteers may be provided with grant funds to repair household water and sewer lines, meters, faucets and other concerns.

According to Dr. Sherry McKibben, Community Development Specialist, a specific set of criteria will contribute to ORCA's assessment of Huntsville and its need for grant funds.

"We have to demonstrate that we have the volunteer base necessary to be able to complete these projects," she said. "At the meeting, ORCA representatives will want to see our need for the proposed projects, the types of projects we need completed, the number of volunteers available to complete the

projects and the source and type of available equipment through local donations necessary to complete the projects.

"Basically, we need to show that we're ready to work, we have the capacity to complete the work and, most importantly, that we really have people who need this assistance. The more people who show up who need assistance, the better."

The August 13 meeting, McKibben said, will be a vital part of ORCA's assessment in determining the city's capacity to complete a STEP project by utilizing self-help methods and volunteer labor.

"This STEP program requires that the project benefit at least 51 percent low to moderate income persons, is completed primarily by volunteer labor within two years, and shows a 40 percent cost savings from construction retail costs," she said. "The community must be invited by ORCA to apply for the grant based on the outcome of the Town Hall Meeting and an assessment to be submitted thereafter."

For more information, contact Steve Kohn at (936) 291-5442 or at skohn@huntsvilletx.gov.

Huntsville Hospitality Association to unite, improve tourism industry

For Karen Fletcher and Richard Serrill, general managers of two Huntsville hotels, hospitality is a vital part of working in the tourism industry.

To make hospitality in Huntsville more prevalent, the two business managers have joined forces to create the Huntsville Hospitality Association, a non-profit professional organization representing hotels, motels, bed and breakfast facilities and restaurants.

The goal of the group is to provide an avenue to further professionalism, knowledge and profitability while also providing a level of camaraderie within the hospitality industry and creating additional public awareness.

"The whole purpose of the Huntsville Hospitality Association is to create unity among our hospitality industry professionals," Fletcher, the general manager of the Holiday Inn Express & Suites, said. "This is a small, southern town, and everything about Huntsville shows southern hospitality except our industry. What we want to do is unite Huntsville's tourism industry and make sure we all have the tools to bring people to Huntsville."

Serrill, Comfort Suites general manager, said he hopes the association will help to create a sense of community among hotel operators, restaurant managers and other hospitality professionals which will ultimately benefit guests in Huntsville.

"Huntsville is so much more than a prison area, and it's our job to reach out to people who visit our area

and let them know what they can do here," Serrill said. "We're going to represent the group that cares about what our guests want when they come to this town, and we hope to create that kind of standard throughout our association."

"If my establishment was full, for example, I'd like to have the assurance that I could send a family to another hotel, and they would receive the same level of treatment as if they had stayed with us."

Fletcher said the association will hold meetings at various hotels in Huntsville in order to showcase each facility and to provide guidance for hospitality professionals.

"We want to take the experience we have and work with others in our industry to create a better hotel environment in Huntsville," she said. "To do that, we hope to hold training sessions at each hotel in the association free of charge. We

have experience from two years to 16 years, so why not use it to show others how to better serve their guests?"

The first meeting of the Huntsville Hospitality Association will be held on August 6 at 8:30 a.m. at the Holiday Inn Express with additional meetings to follow throughout the coming months.

For more information, contact Fletcher at (936) 295-4300 or Serrill at (936) 436-9600.



Kid's Korner

Forest Animals

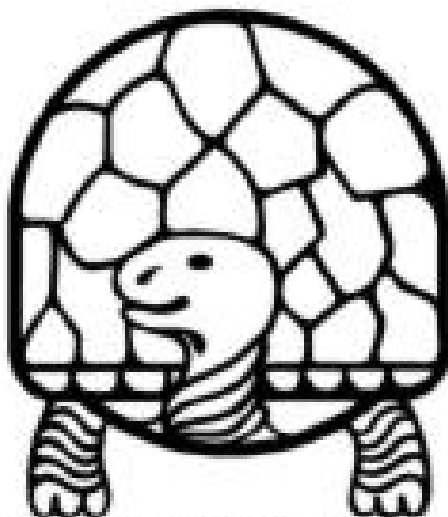


v	c	o	e	j	o	t	b	e	a	r	r
i	x	s	j	p	w	y	f	v	n	l	a
m	s	f	d	o	l	r	o	d	h	y	b
s	k	o	y	r	o	s	x	e	i	x	b
u	u	r	k	c	v	q	t	e	i	o	i
q	n	e	q	u	o	u	g	r	u	j	t
n	k	s	w	p	k	i	l	p	n	h	q
a	b	t	o	i	g	r	g	y	x	u	n
j	c	r	l	n	x	r	c	i	e	w	e
c	b	x	f	e	h	e	w	q	e	x	o
p	k	k	p	f	f	l	s	h	z	p	m
w	r	a	c	c	o	o	n	t	q	l	y

forest deer bear fox
 owl raccoon squirrel
 rabbit skunk wolf porcupine



Color the
 turtle!



Calendar

August 2009

- 4 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 5 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 12 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796
- 18 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 19 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 26 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796

September 2009

- 1 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 2 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 9 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796
- 15 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 16 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 23 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796
- 30 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required

October 2009

- 6 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 7 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 14 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796
- 20 City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1212 Avenue M
- 21 Yard Waste Trimming Collection - no call in required
- 28 Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste Collection — **call in required** (936) 294-5796

Please note: All requests for Heavy Trash pick-up must be made no later than noon on Monday, the week of the pick-up.



Visit www.huntsvilletx.gov
 for a complete calendar of events.